

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 4, 2014

Honorable Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We appreciate your efforts in the past to work with our constituents and make common sense changes to the school lunch program during the on-going implementation of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA). However, new concerns have arisen from school nutrition directors in our districts. Schools across Missouri are experiencing significant increases in costs, administrative burdens, and regulatory consequences that have had an adverse effect on the participation rates and sustainability of school nutrition programs.

While we agree that it is important to craft school lunch policies that promote a healthy environment for children, provide reasonable flexibility for administrators, and maximize program efficiency, it has become clear to us that many of these changes are increasing costs and plate waste for schools. These changes have negative effects on the program due to decreasing participation rates that put program integrity in jeopardy. Missouri schools can rise to the challenge, but have asked for increased meal pattern flexibility in the following areas:

- **Whole Grain Requirements** - Permanently cap the whole grain requirement at 50 percent. In July 2014 all grains offered must be whole grain rich leaving many rural schools struggling due to limited availability of products and strong regional preferences.
- **Sodium Targets** - Suspend “Target 2” sodium levels and maintain the current standards. Schools have already made significant reductions in sodium levels and are concerned that further reductions will limit choices, increase costs, and reduce participation rates.

In addition, many of our small and rural schools are struggling to serve “competitive foods” that provide sufficient revenue to sustain the already-stressed child nutrition budgets. We believe it is prudent for the USDA to reopen and extend the comment period for the “Smart Snacks in School” interim final rule until July 2015. Doing so would allow the USDA to make proper adjustments to the rule, based on the collection and assessment of data by stakeholders made during the first year of implementation.

School Food Authorities in Missouri and across the nation are facing serious administrative and financial burdens. As the USDA implements the Healthy and Hunger Free Kids Act, we ask the

Department to work to simplify child nutrition program to mitigate the pressures our schools are facing. Each Missouri school is unique and needs flexibility to provide high quality, nutritious meals to each student in an efficient and cost effective way.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to continue working with the USDA on these important issues.

Sincerely,



Vicky Hartzler
Member of Congress



Sam Graves
Member of Congress



Blaine Luetkemeyer
Member of Congress



Jason Smith
Member of Congress